

the patentability of that claim against the prior art.” (cited in MPEP §§ 2143.03 and 2173.06). The fact that the leadframe and semiconductor devices do not need to be present to find infringement of the claim does not give the examiner the right to ignore claim language when evaluating the claims against the prior art.

In the present case, the recitations in the claim define structural features of the claimed support apparatus. The fact that these recitations define the structure in terms of what it does, rather than what it is, does not render them meaningless. As set forth in MPEP § 2173.05(g), these recitations must be evaluated and considered for what they fairly convey to a person of ordinary skill in the pertinent art.

Claim 1 recites that the leadframe support member is formed with at least one groove “for receiving said semiconductor devices.” Thus, the claim recites not only that the support member has a groove, but that this groove must be capable of receiving semiconductor devices. This statement functions as a structural limitation on the support member, i.e. its groove must be of a size and shape that will accommodate a row of non-singulated semiconductor devices.

Claim 1 goes on to recite that the groove is formed on the leadframe support member such that, in use, “leads extending from the semiconductor devices lie on a surface of the support member.” This recitation acts as a further limitation on the structure of the leadframe support member, namely that the groove is arranged relative to a support surface in a manner that, when semiconductor devices are received in the groove, their leads lie on the surface. These structural features of the leadframe support member are not disclosed in the Tsurishima patent.

In rejecting the claims, the Office Action asserts that the Tsurishima patent discloses a leadframe support member that exhibits the claimed properties (page 3,

section 3, second paragraph). However, it does not identify what portions of the reference are being relied upon to support this statement. Insofar as the claims are concerned, the most relevant portion of the disclosure of the Tsurishima patent relates to the features illustrated in Figures 5B and 7B. As shown in Figure 5B, each semiconductor package 44 is received within a seat 100, which might be considered to constitute a groove. While the body 44 of the package is supported, the leads 46 extending therefrom are located within slits 102 in the carrier 22. As shown in Figure 7B, the leads do not rest on any surface. Rather, they are suspended in mid-air. This arrangement is designed so that a test contactor 103 can engage the leads 46 from below, through the slits 102, as shown in Figure 10B (column 9, lines 20-26). As such, the tray 24 and carrier 22 do not meet the recitation of a leadframe support member that is formed with at least one groove for receiving semiconductor devices *such that, in use, leads extending from the devices lie on a surface of the support member*, as set forth in claim 1.

In summary, while the claims are directed to a support apparatus, per se, it is respectfully submitted that it is proper to claim the features of the support apparatus in functional terms that describe their relationship to the devices they are designed to support. Such functional terms cannot be ignored in determining the patentability of the claims. Since the Tsurishima patent does not disclose a support apparatus which exhibits the claimed arrangement of a groove and a support surface, it cannot be considered to anticipate the rejected claims.

Reconsideration and withdrawal of the rejection, and allowance of all pending claims is respectfully submitted. If the rejection is not withdrawn, the examiner is requested to either (a) identify the portions of the reference that are being relied

upon as a basis for the statement in the Office Action that the reference discloses a leadframe support member that is formed with at least one groove for receiving semiconductor devices such that, in use, leads extending from the devices lie on a surface of the support member, or (b) cite authority for the position that these recitations in the claims can be ignored when determining patentability. In the absence of such a showing, it is respectfully submitted that the rejection cannot be maintained as currently set forth.

Respectfully submitted,

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